

## Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

### Conservation Aquaculture Center

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

It's a non-descript metal building in a compound tucked on the edge of Marion, North Carolina. From the outside, it looks like just another small warehouse. However, step inside and it's clear you're in no warehouse.

This is the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission's Conservation Aquaculture Center. Inside, the hum of water pumps fills the air, and you see shelves filled with water basins and a network of PVC pipes moving water through them. Within those basins are some of the rarest animals in North Carolina, and this non-descript metal building is a vital part of the effort to conserve them.

One bin contains Carolina heelsplitters, one of the rarest mussels in the nation. Another contains Appalachian elktoes, a mussel found only in a handful of Southern Appalachian rivers. Another holds spotfin chub, a threatened fish being stocked in the Cheoah River in North Carolina's Graham County, getting it one step closer to being taken off the endangered species list.

The center meets several needs. It holds what biologists call ark populations – groups of individuals safeguarded in captivity as a way to ensure they don't go extinct should they disappear from the wild. It's a place where the young of imperiled animals can be raised in a safe environment, eventually to be stocked into the wild, helping boost numbers and recover some of our rarest aquatic animals.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.